

GEORGE DeLONG

Dear Miss McCullough:

About a month ago, you asked for, and a week ago I promised to give you, an individual account of the events that took place at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. This I now plan to do despite the fact that I realize only too well that the story which you are about to read contains little that can honestly be termed, heroic. Instead, this is a story of a struggle for survival. It contains none of the heroism that, under slightly different circumstances, might have permeated an account of that day. On the other hand, the negative aspects are only part of the story. For the individual participants there is much to be said on the positive side. But I am ~~getting~~ setting ahead of my story. It is my intent in these introductory paragraphs to lay the ground rules for my narrative, not give the summary and conclusions.

First of all, I would like to state that it is my intent to be as completely honest as memory of an event eighteen years past will permit. Much of the glamour which might otherwise accompany this story is therefore removed. Secondly, I shall try to the best of my ability to remain objective when reporting the factual history of the events. Finally, it will be my aim to present some personal observations and psychological interpretations without injecting too much of my own ego. However, in regard to the latter statement, I must point out that the very nature of this account demands that much of it be written in the first person singular and I shall therefore proceed accordingly and without apology.

The story of how I managed, or rather happened, to be in Pearl Harbor aboard the battleship U.S.S. Oklahoma as a sailor in the United States Navy on December 7, 1941, is, of course, a very long and, except to me, a rather tedious one, and I will not bore you with it. I shall therefore restrict the descriptions of my life prior to that time to those which you requested and to those which are essential for the purpose of identification.

I was born in a small town in Pennsylvania named Annville on June 26, 1922. ~~My father died when I was four years old.~~ Like many other boys from small towns in Pennsylvania, I had worked in both

field and factory by the time I graduated from high school in June of 1940. After a six months period of employment in a local hosiery mill, I yielded to that magnificent piece of honest propaganda "Join the Navy and See the World" and enlisted at Lancaster, Pennsylvania soon after Christmas of the year 1940. Being eighteen years old at the time, was not eligible for the minority cruise enlistment available to those under that age. Therefore, I was required to "sign up" for six years and, while I hesitated to sign away that long a period of my life without knowing exactly what I was heading into, I dreaded even more giving up my dreams of travel and the opportunities of a search for new knowledge and excitement that a life in the U. S. Navy promised. My decision to go ahead carried me to Philadelphia where I was "sworn in" in January of 1941 despite some mental reservations concerning the wisdom of this action. Looking back now, I can honestly say that, as far as I am concerned, the Navy never reneged on its promises of adventure, excitement, travel, etc., nor have I been sorry that I chose this course for my initial introduction into adult life.

The new life on which I embarked proved very interesting to me, but, if I am to keep that earlier promise not to bore you with routine details, I must admit that there was little that was unique about my early training. From Philadelphia, I went to Newport, Rhode Island for "boot" training and, having successfully negotiated this first obstacle to progress, I eagerly boarded a train for San Diego, California where I attended Quartermaster Training School. The big day arrived when, on graduation, the assignments to ships were posted. The pride with which I received my assignment as a Quartermaster Striker was more than doubled when I found that my duties as an "assistant to the navigator" would be performed on one of the major capital ships of the U. S. Navy, none other than the battleship U. S. S. Oklahoma! Please forgive me if this description of my pride sounds a bit unreasonable, prejudiced, and somewhat overenthusiastic, but I was young and excited then. To tell the truth, I find that, even my heart beats a little faster when I think of her. I say this despite the fact that it must be recognized that she was a rather ancient ship at the time and that, as a

"man-of-war", her end came rather ignominiously.

If you will allow me to digress for a moment, and before I am accused of lack of respect for the memory of my old ship, I would like to explain that it is not my purpose here to subtract from the credit which was and is rightly her's. This would not only be unfair to the ship itself, but to all the men who first felt the spray of ~~the~~ salt water from her bow and developed their sea legs on her decks. That she was an easy mark for an undeclared enemy, and that she died without putting up much of a fight, is hard to deny. But to let the record stand there without any positive statement concerning her contribution to the war effort would be false and misleading. She need not bear a total or even a major part of the stigma that was attached to the unpreparedness of that fateful day when Uncle Sam was caught with his arms dangling when he should have had them upraised for a fight. On the other hand, it can be pointed out that even the tragic loss of the ship and many of her crew was to some degree compensated for by the fact that many of her experienced well-trained crew survived to be utilized in a very telling fashion as the nucleus of other crews. The value of this "leavening of the fleet" is hard to estimate, but I believe, and I think justifiably, that many ships are afloat and consequently countless lives still in existence today, because the U.S.S. Oklahoma once sailed as a proud member of the U. S. Navy. Of this at least, I am sure, that while the country suffered a great loss when the Oklahoma capsized at Pearl Harbor, it would have suffered a far greater loss had she never existed.

Now, back to my story, I could hardly wait to pack my sea bag, board the train to San Francisco, and get aboard my newly assigned vessel. Once aboard, I could hardly wait to get underway. However, it seems the U.S. Navy had a nasty habit of not making its schedule coincide with mine and I was forced to remain a landlubber for a few more days. This time was spent in getting to know my shipmates and duties as well as learning to "go ashore" even though I had never been to sea. After a few "teaser" trips, i.e., test runs, we got underway and headed toward the Hawaiian Islands where we were to operate with other ships of the Pacific Fleet.

It was as a member of the battle force returned from manuevers that we happened to be in Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7, 1941.

At this point, my narrative must of necessity be narrowed in focus to one compartment of the ship, namely, the after steering station. This compartment, which in Navy lingo became "steering aft", was not only equipped with auxilliary steering devices, but also contained numerous bunks and lockers which were used by the Quartermaster Gang of which I was a member.

There was nothing unique about such dual usefulness of a compartment on a Navy ship and the inconveniences of having a large rudder shaft, spare steering engine, and four high emergency hand steering wheels in one's bedroom were easily ignored once one got accustomed to it. This compartment was located deep in the ship, four decks below the main deck to be exact, and just forward of the rudder. The location of this compartment became very important as you shall soon see.

It was to this compartment "home" that I returned from a liberty ashore at approximately 11:00 p.m. on the night of December 6, 1941. As I came down the ladder from the woodwork shop on the deck above, I stopped to chat with the Artley brothers who had been on duty earlier that night and were now indulging in a favorite sailor's pastime by playing a game of Acie-Ducie. Little did I dream, as I climbed peacefully into my bunk that night, that the events of the next day would separate these two closely-knit brothers forever.

X Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, seemed like many other Sunday mornings in port when "holiday routine" was set throughout the ship. Some of the men slept in late that morning and missed "chow down". I was among these, but then, who cared about missing breakfast? True, we were going to be a little busy that morning cleaning up for an admiral's inspection scheduled for the next day. But then, a big Sunday dinner was only three and a half or four hours away and after that, a guy could relax if he felt that the swabbed decks and polished brightwork in the compartment compared favorably with the rest of the ship.

At about 7:45 or 7:50, one of the men came down the ladder with a bucket filled with soapy water. This water was to be used for general cleaning and for swabbing the deck. It was never put to the use for which it was intended. A world-shaking event prevented that from happening.

As nearly as I can recall, it must have been about 8:00 a.m. when the sound of the boatswain's pipe came over the loud speaker system. This was followed by a rather anxious, but otherwise routine, announcement - "Now hear this, general quarters! All hands, man your battle stations, set condition zed!" This final instruction referred to the setting of the utmost water tight integrity throughout the ship. The sudden sequence of events which followed this announcement prevented the carrying out of his instructions to any effective degree. The significance of this announcement which was initiated by the action being witnessed by the men topside was by no means felt among those of us who were below decks. Typical of our reaction was the muttering of the man who wanted to know "Why the hell would anybody want to hold a drill on a morning like this?" It must, in all fairness, be said that the man was on the move at the time he said it and that the statement was more that of petty griping than of defiance or disrespect for authority. Furthermore, the split second that allowed even such a complaint thought was shattered immediately by the voice of the Officer of the Deck who, sensing the urgency of the situation, resorted to a stimulant to action that would have been completely out of order under normal circumstances. He used rather strong language profane language over the loud speaker system. Unfortunately, this salty prodding came too late to be of much value, for he had not finished his first sentence when a tremendous explosion, followed by another - and another - and still another - until I lost track of the number, shook the ship from stem to stern. In a matter of seconds, she took a heavy list to port and, as I was to learn later, only the lines secured to the battleship on the starboard side, ~~which~~ inboard at the berth, prevented a complete capsizing at that moment. This reprieve was short lived however, since the lines had to be parted to prevent the loss of both ships. The Oklahoma increased her list to port until she capsized, embedding her mast in the bottom of the harbor.

While all this was happening, life in steering aft became extremely chaotic to say the least. I have never seen the world literally turned upside down to the extent that I did that day. The bucket of soapy water slid across the deck spilling its contents as it went.

*FOOTING*

One of the men lost his footing and went sliding after the bucket with his arms and legs flying helplessly through the air. Another man grabbed one of the large steering wheels, and, as luck would have it, found himself spread out on it, as though on a rack, when the shaft to the rudder suddenly became engaged. The last time I saw him before the lights went out, he was spinning very rapidly. He wisely held on until the ship came to rest.

The lights went out, as nearly as I can recollect, at about the time the ship passed through the ninety degree point of its arc from the upright to the capsized position. Before that happened, however, most of the spare machinery which had always seemed so secure before, broke loose and went crashing across the deck smashing everything in its path. In order to avoid ~~being~~ being crushed by this stampeding machinery, I, like most of my shipmates who were not already caught in some other awkward position, climbed to the top of a bunk stanchion. From this vantage point of comparative safety, I was able to witness ~~much~~ <sup>much</sup> of what occurred during those hectic moments. One short lived threat to my retention of this position came in the form of a bar of metal from a weight lifting set which broke loose rather suddenly and came sailing toward me like a javelin. Being in a totally helpless condition at the time, I can only be thankful that the metal bar hit the stanchion to which I was clinging and fell harmlessly across my legs leaving nothing but a scuffed shin as a temporary reminder of the ordeal.

All of these things, and many more, happened in a few stormy moments. But, hectic and chaotic as those moments were, they were followed by even greater demoralizers, namely, the darkness, the sound of impounding water, and the sudden acknowledgment of the fact that we were hopelessly trapped. I am sure that the panic which I felt at that moment was shared by everyone of my shipmates in that compartment. Fortunately for all of us, it was a controlled panic and an initial spurt of brain paralyzing,

tongue tying hopelessness soon gave way to a frenzied burst of mental and physical activity.

It didn't take long to come to the conclusion that without external help, we were doomed. I must admit that I ~~had~~ one seriously considered attempting to swim down through the ~~immense~~ <sup>the</sup> darkened, water flooded decks in order to bring back help for the others. The idea must have occurred to some of the other men at the time, but common sense, which seemed to rule during most of the next day and a half, prevented all of us from making this grandly heroic, but ~~such~~ totally futile gesture.

Once having abandoned all possible schemes for sudden release from our watery prison, the first step needed to improve our rather precarious lot was quite obvious to all of us. The main flow of water into the compartment would have to be brought under control.

This feat was accomplished by a group effort, the first of many that were to follow during the next day and a half.

I would like to make another brief digression from my story at this time in order to make a necessary explanation. You may have observed that I have been shifting ~~pronouns~~ from the first person singular to the first person plural in the last few paragraphs. This has been by design rather than ~~an~~ accident. The change in ~~time of the~~ <sup>those</sup> pronouns here symbolizes very clearly the change in thinking that took place during these ~~(if you'll pardon me)~~ tense moments.

In the early stages of our struggle for survival, circumstances dictated courses of action that were completely individualistic: each man was on his own. This was followed by a period of individual actions which were, nonetheless, directed toward a group effort. In the final stages, we all thought and acted as a group even to the point of voting on important decisions. It is logical, therefore, that this description of the ~~xx~~ events should follow the same course as my (our) thinking did that day.

I mentioned before that bringing the main inflow of water under control was, at the moment, our most pressing problem. In order to understand the problem, please

try to comprehend all that is involved in the statement "down is up and up is down". Try to visualize any building in which you might be located suddenly turned upside down so that the floor becomes the ceiling, the ceiling becomes the floor, the right wall becomes the left wall, but turned the other way, etc., etc., etc. If you are now thoroughly confused, your next step is to mentally turn off the ~~light~~ lights.

It was in this condition that we found ourselves after the ship turned over. Our deck had become our overhead, the starboard bulkhead was now the port bulkhead and the ~~a~~ large open vent that had formerly supplied fresh air from the overhead was now spouting water like a broken off fire hydrant.

Our first attempts at restricting the flow of water from the vent were not very successful. We managed to get to a few of the lockers which were still above water and from these, we got some life saving equipment in the form of clothing and an old flashlight. The clothing was used as a temporary plug to stop the water ~~at~~ and the flashlight of course spotlighted this operation. As far as the stuffing of the clothes into the vent was concerned, we made little progress individually since the force of the water easily removed all items of clothing presented in that manner. Only when we decided that a large pile of clothing carefully inserted by some of the men and held in place by the others was our only means of accomplishing our task did we make any headway. All of us heaved a sigh of relief when the gusher was finally ~~stop~~ converted to a small steady flow.

Please do not be mislead by that last statement into thinking that our problems were solved, it only meant that for the first time since the beginning of the debacle, we would be able to take a breather while we analyzed our position. It was decided that four men should stand around the vent holding in the clothing so that future actions could be planned. The first item on the agenda was a muster (i.e. roll call) of the men present. This was accomplished very simply by each man calling out his last name. Eight men responded to this first muster and it was generally agreed that everyone who had been in the compartment at the time the ship capsized was still alive. This practice of calling out to insure each other of our individual safety continued periodically throughout our entrapment. If my memory is

not playing tricks, I think we later refined our mustering system so that numbers were used instead of names. There were// several reasons for the continuation of the muster, not the least of which was the fear that someone might fall asleep and slide into the water which inundated the lower side of the compartment.

The names of some of the men answering the muster were: Artley (the younger of the two brothers previously mentioned); Beal, Bounds, and DeLong (my own). I have forgotten the names of the other four men. As nearly as I can remember, all eight of us were Seamen stricking (i.e. studying) for a rating in navigation work/ and consequently had been assigned to the "N" Division.

These first moments when thought followed by collective action began to replace the instinctive individual actions that had prevailed previously were the preludes to more inclusive analyses, decisions, and actions. A careful recap \_\_\_\_\_<sup>Recapitulation</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ of our position revealed the following facts:

- a. Our earlier fears that we were hopelessly trapped, so far as escape founded on our own initiative was concerned, were reinforced rather than alleviated by a careful analysis of our status;
- b. The patchwork on the broken air vent was to say the least, temporary and much had yet to be done to remove the threat of sudden flooding of the compartment.
- c. The compartment was already flooded to the point where only a limited, high area could be traversed with comparative safety.
- d. The air in the compartment was already becoming compressed and somewhat stale;
- e. Decissions would have to be made as to whether we should risk opening a door that led to another compartment.
- f. The life of the lifesaving flashlight was rapidly diminishing;
- g. A means of contacting and communicating with someone outside the compartment would have to be established.

As can be seen, the most pressing problem which governed all the others was again the problem of shoring up the water leak, this time more permanently.

At this point, I would like to repeat that I can only give you the facts as I remember them. Any interpretation of why things happened as they did will be left to

your own imagination or belief since many of the happenings bordered on what is commonly referred to as the miraculous. To this day, I am still hard pressed to explain these things logically in my own mind and therefore, I will avoid the pitfalls inherent in any attempt at explanation.

The facts of the story are these. It was known by every man present that something better than clothing would have to be used as the initial plug and that a more permanent means of holding the plug in place would have to be found. The first of these was solved when one of the men took a bunk mattress which had providentially fallen within safe reaching, wrapped it into a roll and, with the aid of several others, forced it into the vent on top of the clothing. An obvious advantage to this type of plug was that one man instead of four could now hold back the water. ~~Time~~ Therefore, one man was assigned to sit on top of the now tamed geyser. The need for a solution to the second part of the problem was emphasized very clearly as soon as the first man to take this honored post was in ~~present~~ position. He reported, and we all realized, that he would not be able to stay there forever, since the water was already up to his waist and while its flow was curbed, it was still rising.

At that moment, one of the fast sweeps of our sparingly used flashlight revealed the plywood Acey-Ducey board floating on the water and gently moving in our direction. By carefully avoiding any motion which would send it out of reach in the now treacherous waters below, we were able to recover this precious object. This board when placed over the top of the vent proved to be just the right size and it was generally agreed that if we would have cut a board specifically for this purpose, we could not have done better. Shortly after this discovery, another sweep of the beam of our now dying flashlight exposed a piece of line (rope) approximately eighteen feet long lying at our feet. By ingeniously tying this line to nearby pipes and electrical installations, we were able to complete the indispensable "I" over the top of the board. Since it was this piece of line alone that held the sum of our handiwork in place without the need of further human attention, it was interesting to note that only six inches of rope remained after the last knot was tied. Shortly after the completion of this chore, the flashlight went out and we discovered that only

by a very ~~max~~ meticulous positioning of the bulb against the battery could any light be obtained. From that moment on, the flashlight was ~~maxx~~ turned on only during emergencies.

Our attention was now turned to a problem that involved the making of a momentous decision. Should we or should we not open the door which led to the compartment adjacent to us? This door was at the moment securely "dogged down", i.e., all six of the tightening handles were turned shut and the door was therefore sealed to its frame in a watertight condition. The argument against opening this door was singular, but potent - if the compartment on the other side was flooded, we would drown before anyone would have a chance to swim out. On the other hand, the argument for opening it was also rather compelling - if the compartment was still solid and dry, we could trade some of our unwanted salt water for some badly needed fresh air. Our dilemma was further complicated by the fact that the time which we had to make the decision was very short since the water in our compartment was already approaching the lower reaches of the door.

After a brief but thorough discussion of the alternatives, a vote was taken and it was decided, unanimously, that the door should be opened. Once having decided, we all approached the fateful door as res ~~hast~~ as possible under the circumstances and, like men playing a mass game of Russian Roulette, we threw open the last dog that held the water tight door in place. There was no rush of water; the compartment was intact, its contents-fresh air!

This turn of events extended our lease but did not pay the rent. That is, the time was extended for the solution of our problems but that was no insurance that the problems would be solved. We began to realize more and more that our own efforts, no matter how ingenious, successful or prolonged, would be of no value if we did not make contact with somebody topside. (It seemed odd to think of the ship's bottom as being "topside", but that was now the case.) The thought that only an outside effort could be of any significance at this stage was forcefully driven home by the sounds of hammer blows against steel that were heard now reverberating through the ship. Apparently, there were others in the same predicament. We were not alone

in wondering if somebody up there heard us. You see, by this time, we too were pounding out our clumsy S.O.S.'s on the steel bulkhead with a big twenty-five pound wrench which, like so many other instruments of vital importance, had fallen within our reach.

Before I enter the final phase of this story, however, it might be wise to give you a brief description of the new atmosphere in the compartment. Oddly enough, the few lines which describe this atmosphere account for most of the time with which this story is involved.

Once we had taken every conceivable action to secure our position as advantageously as possible, we adjourned to the safety of the high spot previously mentioned. In this area, all our silent hopes and unspoken prayers had a chance to jell into a form of courage that was to sustain us for more than a day under conditions as trying as any that can be imagined. I can say in all honesty that, to the best of my knowledge, no mean ~~or~~ selfish act was committed by anyone in the group. Further, and perhaps more importantly, this conduct was exhibited by men <sup>also</sup> eagerly fighting for their lives who at no time accepting the early snuffing out of those lives as inevitable.

The silence which sometimes settled over ~~us~~ us should be compared to that found in the eye of a hurricane. Feverish activity surrounded our cell, but we were frequently left with uncounted time on our hands when things moved ~~sightless~~ neither forward nor backward - there was only a void. The meaning of the statement to the effect that time is a relative thing had never taken on the significance that it did that day. A question like "Was that five seconds or ten hours that just passed?" would have gone unanswered not because the hearers disdained to answer such a stupid question, but because the most enlightened member in the group could not have given an honest answer. The ~~nummumnummungnummung~~ numbing effects that immersion in water and oil had on our bodies, combined with the physical changes which accompany emotional stresses and strains, tended to wipe out what would normally have been the rough check of routine body functions as a guide. We were neither hot nor cold, hungry

nor bloated. Those things belonged to a normal world and our immediate world was anything but normal.

I suppose by now you can understand my concern as to how I could restrict myself to a presentation of the facts of the case when the one fact that stood out in my mind was the lack of sequential wholeness which is a prime requisite if such a presentation is to have meaning. I hasten to add, however, that the remainder of the account will be more straightforward since the events that now lead to our rescue can be presented less confusingly.

None of the eight men in the compartment could state precisely, or even roughly for that matter, when we picked up our first contact with the outside world which was really only a few feet away from us. Our early S.O.S.'s established contact with two radiomen who were located in a small auxiliary radio compartment just forward of us in the ship. By carefully timing our signals with theirs and with the others that were being sent throughout the ship, we were able to untangle the scrambled pleas for help that early pervaded our makeshift communication network. To say that our means of communication were crude, is a gross understatement. But, the old statement about necessity being the mother of invention seemed to fit the situation and we were able to understand and to be understood.

After what seems endless attempts to contact someone topside, we were successful in doing so. In the compartment all hands took turns swinging the heavy wrench during the early sending of the S.O.S. signals. Once having established contact, however, it was agreed that, while everybody would attempt to read the painstakingly delivered messages, only two of us who had recently completed our training in Morse Code should interpret and send messages.

We proceeded accordingly. Some of the messages we sent out consisted of such terse statements as - We are in steering aft - and - Hurry, water rising fast. In response to a question from our correspondent topside as to how many men, we replied - eight.

The most important message which we heard from our still unknown benefactor, however, was the one which read - Your aid is coming soon. This was followed after some

further minor exchanges with the question from topside - How are you on AR? Now AR at that time was code for "end of transmission". The man topside was asking us to stop sending! I hope you can understand our initial reaction of alarm when, upon finally having made contact, the man asks us as politely as possible to please be quiet. Our first impulse to holler no, no, no was placed in check when we decided that we better hang up since someone else might want on the line.

Some time after this exchange, we heard the noise of chipping drills that sounded like the rat-tat-tat of a drill of the type used to dig up street pavings. Occasionally, we heard the noise of a metal plate dropping and sliding down over the ~~the~~ inner side of the ship's double bottom. Each one seemed to be getting closer when suddenly we heard the happy shouts and cheers of men escaping from another part of the ship. This, to say the least, was a bitter pill to swallow. Only those of us who were trapped know how happy we were to hear others escape, but the thought that the drilling we had been hearing had not been directed toward our rescue was rather hard to take on top of all the other emotional experiences we had been through. The workmen who were performing the rescue operations seemed to have understood our ~~frustration~~ plight and our wrench pourlings were soon drowned out by the renewed rat-tat-tat of the drills above our heads.

The ear splitting noises that were issued from those jack hammers would hardly be termed pleasant under normal circumstances. That day, they sounded like music. A symphony of hope and release from despair was being conducted by a yard workman in dungarees only a few inches from our heads while our numb bodies, ~~numbed~~ which were now immersed in water which had risen up to our waists, started to respond to this heady stimulant.

The last plate of metal baring our exit dropped down the side and a pinpoint of  $\frac{1}{4}$  light came through a hole near a small hatch which we had wisely kept ~~not~~ closed until this moment. Unlike the door to the other compartment, the early opening of this hatch cover would have meant the release of the compressed air which had helped to hold back the water. Now that we were sure that someone was outside, we stopped just long enough to inform each other that this was no time to ruin

everything by stampeding toward the escape hatch, and then proceeded to unbolt the hatch cover. Oddly enough, this cover remained in place even after the last bolt had been opened. The ~~max~~ pop that accompanied the forced opening of this overhead hatch indicated that the air pressure in the compartment was at least partially responsible for this hesitant opening of our escape route.

Our last minute precautions, when coupled with the workmen's pleas of "Don't rush, take it easy", and "you all going to be OK now", and ~~if~~ "relax and give me your hand, we'll see that you get out all right", were important last steps to our escape since the workmen were spread out along the ~~the~~ oil covered insides of the double bottom on very meager perches, and too sudden a movement might have easily dislodged them with disasterous consequences. To these men and to many others, we owe a deep debt of gratitude. Except for their untiring efforts, we would not be here today. As it was, on late Monday afternoon December 8, 1941, eight numb, somewhat dazed, but physically intact sailors were passed up through the bottom of a ship to a little hole that had been cut for their escape. A motor launch pulled alongside to take on its human cargo. Only then ~~did~~ did our senses begin to perceive the scenes of destruction that surrounded us. Only then did we realize that the eyes of what remained of the fleet were ~~were~~ momentarily turned on us with a feeling of compassion reserved for those who return from the brink of death.

Somewhat, as the boat approached the gangway of the navy hospital ship, toward which we were headed, I got the feeling that things would never quite be the same again, but in what ways I could not be certain.

We had been given a cup of water and a cigarette as we entered the boat. Now, as we climbed up the ladder to the quarterdeck, we heard the doctor issuing the ordeal, "Get the brandy". One shot of that, a quick dressing down of some superfluous scratches which we had received while ~~were~~ climbing ~~up~~ out the small holes that had been cut for our escape, a good meal, and a warm, dry bunk did much to wipe out any desire to battle sleep while we tried to figure out what had happened to us. Tomorrow was another day even though we vaguely realized that our country was now at war and that our forces had been badly hurt by the first encounter. I, for one, went off into a deep, untroubled sleep in the midst of a very troubled world.

*W.H.S. Islan*

Somehow the sun rose again the next morning and so did I. Except for the hospital white, which replaced the battleship gray to which I was accustomed, it might have been any other Tuesday morning as far as I was concerned in those early moments of the new day. Two stretches and a yawn later, however, I became fully aware of the fact that this and many days in the immediate future were not destined to be "normal" days. After breakfast, a series of discussions brought to light many of the details concerning the two preceding days, and it was with some reluctance that we broke up the sessions in order to pick up some clothing to wear, hop into a motor launch, and head for a receiving center that had been set up for the men without ships. Perhaps I should note in passing that we needed the clothing since our entire wardrobe consisted of eight pairs of oil stained skivie shorts, (hardly the uniform of the day for eight of Uncle Sam's fighting men). All other possessions had been left behind when we climbed out that little hole.

By the time we reached the beach, we had learned of the fates of many of our shipmates. Many of the men who had been topside had been able to abandon ship before she went over. Others had not been so fortunate. Of the men who had been ~~gr~~ trapped below decks, and there must have been hundreds, thirty-two of us were rescued. Artley's brother was still missing (it was later established that he had been killed) and the two radiomen that had been in the compartment forward of us died of suffocation when the fumes from small fires which had been started by torches used in a rescue attempt got to them before the rescuers.

An incident which occurred as we approached the receiving center stands out in my memory very clearly. One of the junior officers whose name I think was Bill Ingram greeted us warmly and in the course of the conversation that followed, made a statement that was to have a proformal influence on my future outlook of life. Whether he was influenced by a book he had just read or whether the statement he made was original at the time, I do not know. His statement implied that we were so lucky to be there talking to him that we should never have to worry about ourselves again as long as we live since we were "living on borrowed time".

I suppose if I were to try to sum up what Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941,

has meant to me during the past eighteen years, a great deal would hinge on that quotation. Oddly enough, the feeling of freedom which accompanied release tended to instill a sense of responsibility rather than one of abandonment since the greater freedom of choice entailed a correspondingly greater obligation to act responsibly. Boys became men overnight and men could not turn away from their duties toward departed shipmates.

To this day, I feel strongly that since I was granted this bonus of extended life, ~~that~~ it is imperative that it should not be wasted. I also believe that one way to avoid such waste not only of my life but of many others is to learn the major lesson demonstrated at Pearl Harbor and that is that the old saying "eternal vigilance is the price of freedom" must never again go unheeded by free men. If we have learned this lesson so well that we will be able to pass on to future generations the significance of Pearl Harbor, the price, while high, will not have been too great. If, however, we turn our backs on this lesson and let weak sentimentality and wishful thinking replace strong love and logical reasoning, we will be turning our backs on the men who died <sup>theirs</sup> on December 7 and their deaths will have been void of any meaning.

Well, Miss McCullough, there it is. I have written in much greater detail than was originally planned, but, once started, I was carried away. I hope the dedication ceremony is a big success and that all goes well and according to plan. Thank you again for your stimulating interest in the U.S.S. Oklahoma.

Sincerely,

George A. DeLong

P.S. After leaving the U.S.S. Oklahoma, I went aboard the U.S.S. Helena and saw quite a bit of action in the Guadalcanal area. Several transfers later, I ended up my six-year tour of duty at Bikini during the A bomb tests <sup>later</sup> ~~from which~~ I returned to San Francisco, California. <sup>in December of 1946.</sup>  
As per your request, a picture is enclosed.

GAD